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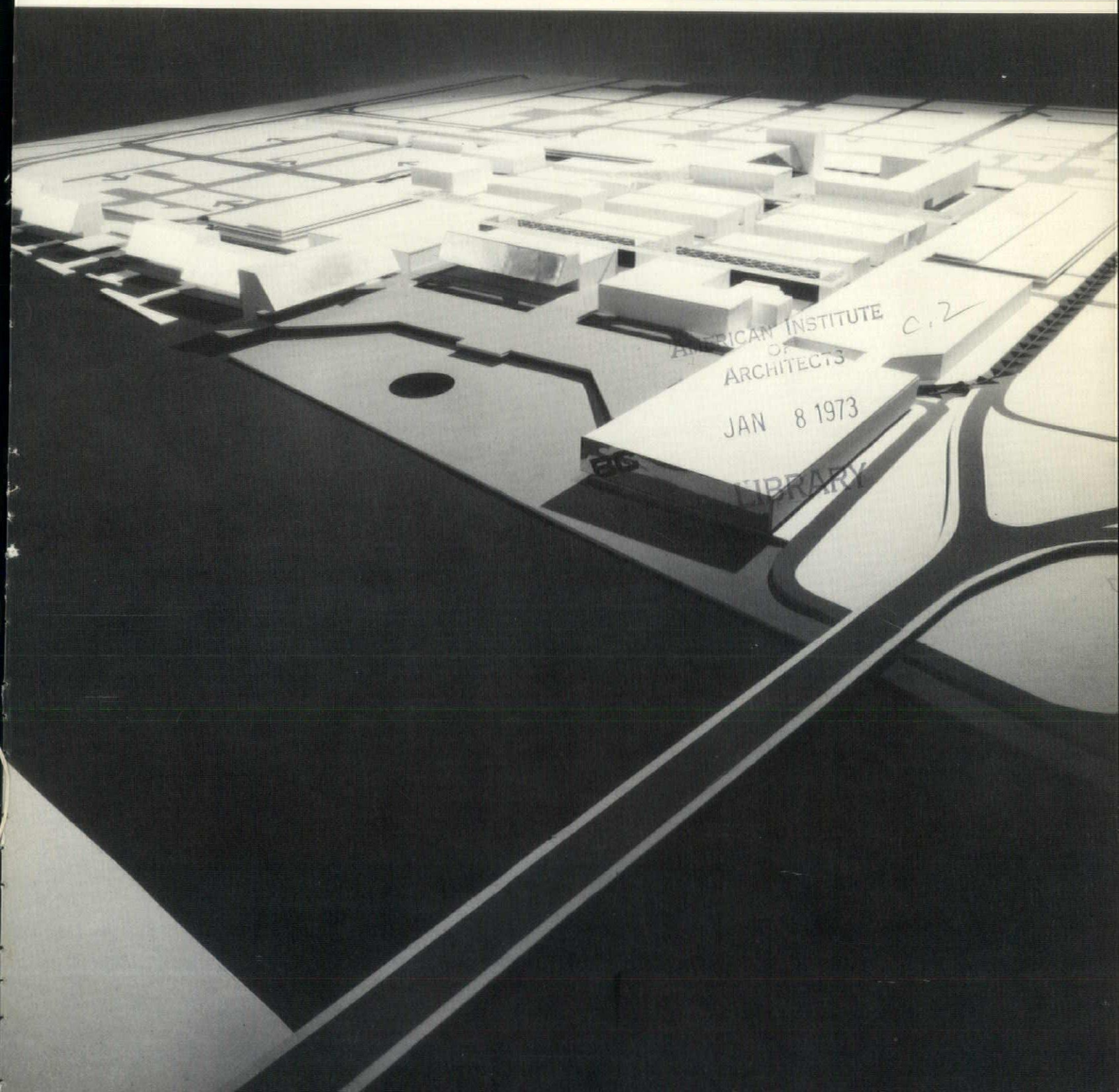

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Monthly Bulletin

Volume 47 No. 12
December, 1972

THE MONTHLY BULLETIN IS PUBLISHED FOR THE MICHIGAN SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS TO ADVANCE THE PROFESSION OF ARCHITECTURE IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN.

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Detroit Will Make It

Having recently returned from his first visit to Europe (Portugal and Spain), the writer is in a better position to comment on the future of Detroit.

What makes for a great and exciting city? A mix of many factors: physical setting, sensitively designed buildings and open spaces, good transportation means, a wide variety and concentration of shopping facilities, good schools and cultural institutions, in-city housing for all income levels, ample employment and recreational opportunities, good police protection. One could identify other factors but these are the principal ones.

Two American cities meeting most of these criteria quickly come to mind: Boston and San Francisco. Both far outdistance Detroit on several counts: physical setting, transportation means and in-city housing. The latter represent major shortcomings for which Detroit would have to compensate in other areas — better schools, increased employment opportunities, better police protection, better design of buildings and open spaces, better and more concentrated shopping facilities.

Two Iberian cities made a lasting impression on the writer: Lisbon and Seville. The former has a population of approximately one million. The latter's population is half-a-million, about the same as the Grand Rapids and Flint. There the similarity ends. The residents of Lisbon and Seville love and utilize the cores of their respective cities. They congregate there in tremendous numbers at all hours of the day and night. In Lisbon they get there on foot, by bus, trolley, subway and car. If they had to depend solely on the automobile, the city would lose its sparkling vitality. It simply is impossible to move the required number of people in and out of the center of Lisbon by car. This is one of Detroit's major problems. When will General Motors, Ford and Chrysler recognize that what would be good for Detroit (speedy mass-transit) would ultimately be good for the automobile industry? Does anyone attempt to argue that Toronto's fine subway system has hurt Canada's automobile industry? Downtown Detroit will never come alive so long as half its buildable land area remains covered with bleak parking lots. The writer cannot recall seeing a single parking lot anywhere near the core of Lisbon or Seville not one. Yet the streets were jammed with people. At night beautiful unaccompanied young girls traverse the streets and cut through connecting alleys. Can you picture this taking place in Detroit? No, partly because Detroit has been designed around the automobile instead of people.

Recently we read of the financial collapse of Detroit's newest nighttime attraction, The Palace. Should this have come as a surprise? Henry Ford II's commendable investment in Detroit's future can never succeed in its purpose unless the fundamental problems of the city are faced squarely and with resolve.

The most urgent need is to turn over the downtown core to the pedestrian, to at least give him preference over the automobile. This requires a superior mass-transit system, elimination of surface parking lots, construction of a high-speed circumferential loop with parking structures along its periphery, construction of new commercial and apartment facilities and intimate parks on the vacated parking lots. By itself Mr. Ford's ambitious venture will only further bleed the central city. At most it would be a tiny island of artificially

Cont'd on page 12

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This environmental design component of the Bay City Riverfront North Renewal Program was an award winner in the recently concluded 1972 Honor Awards Program of the Detroit Chapter.

The design study by Christopher Wzacny and Associates culminates a series of studies developed over a four year period of research, analysis, and documentation that dealt with the social, economic, and physical status of the city in general and the Riverfront North Renewal area in particular.

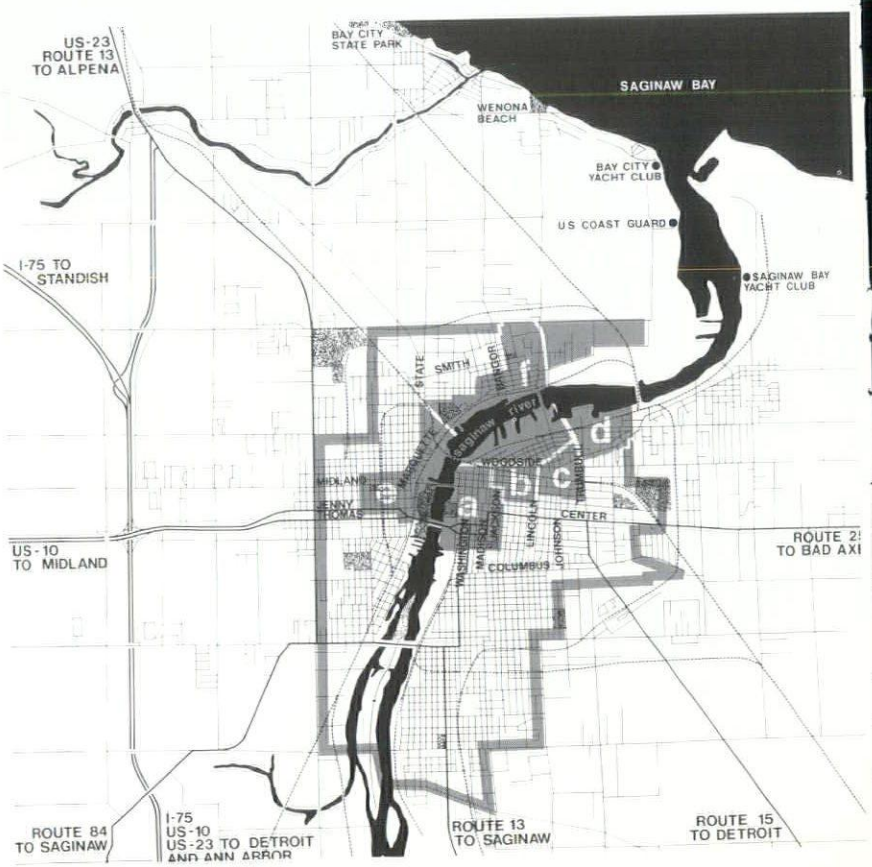
Parkins, Rogers and Associates, planning and urban renewal consultants to Bay City, managed and produced these studies that resulted in the federally assisted General Neighborhood Renewal Plan. The boundaries established by that plan and its generalized planning proposals formed the basis for the design study summarized on these pages.

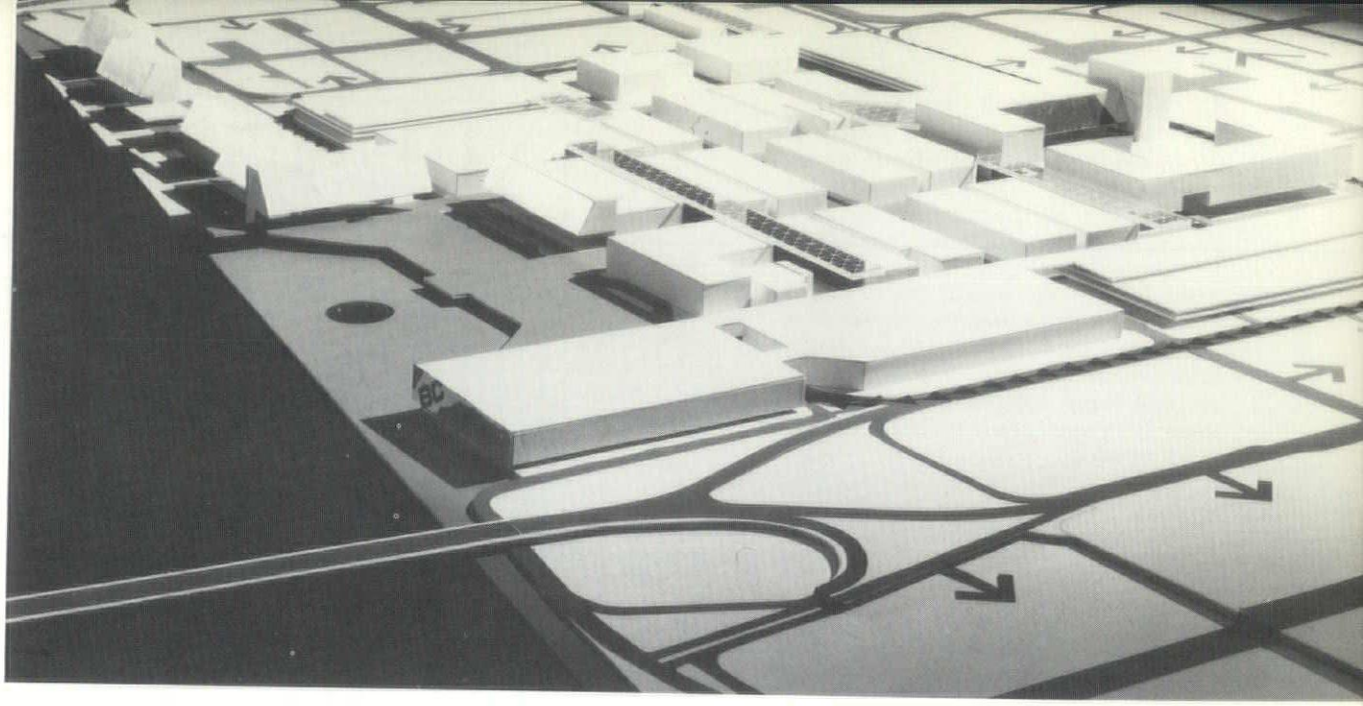
The Birmingham based firm of Wzacny and Associates is currently engaged in a broad range of architectural, planning, and environmental design projects. They function both as principal architects and planners, as well as in a consultative capacity, as in this study, to other professionals or corporations, often utilizing the staff resources of the client firms for project coordination and management. They then concentrate their own efforts to concept development and graphic communication of that development.

The firm's environmental design program for Highland Park, Michigan, done in collaboration with Edward Colbert/Systems, was an award recipient in last year's Detroit Chapter Awards Program and received national recognition as one of seven urban design schemes premiated in the 1972 HUD Design Awards Program.

Bay City Riverfront North

An Environmental Design Study by Christopher Wzacny & Associates, Inc.





Environmental Sectors

Study area limits

a *CBD: to be developed as a compact urban core, largely pedestrian oriented, with a broad array of closely coupled commercial, institutional, and residential uses.*

b *Lincoln/Jackson District: a residential sector in a deteriorating CBD fringe area. The sector is consolidated around expanded school grounds and linked to adjacent sectors on the pedestrian network.*

c *Johnson Street District: a proposed neighborhood shopping area formed from an existing strip commercial cluster.*

d *Woodside District: a residential area currently within an industrial district to be reoriented by thoroughfare relocation to relate to adjacent residential areas.*

e *The Midland Street Area is an existing neighborhood shopping district that is proposed to take on city and regional importance in its relationship to a developing regional park along the river.*

f *Banks District: a neighborhood shopping district developed as a sector focal resource and a penetration to the river.*

Background

The city is both a trans-shipment center for inland industry and a focal point and service center for the rich agricultural region surrounding it. While it currently maintains a healthy commercial establishment, this position is in jeapardy because of competition from a regional shopping center, just west of Flint, near the outer edge of Bay City's trading influence area.

Early indicators of a decentralization trend are also apparent. This trend is being encouraged by increasing congestion, aging of facilities, and lack of land area for expansion and renewal.

Environmental Sectors

It is the objective of the Bay City Riverfront North Environmental Design Study to establish the framework that will pave the way for reversing this perceptible trend toward urban disintegration.

The Riverfront North Study had the broad framework of the General Neighborhood Renewal Program as a starting point. The generalized planning proposals of the GNRP, once established, could then be tested in terms of the three dimensions of the physical environment.

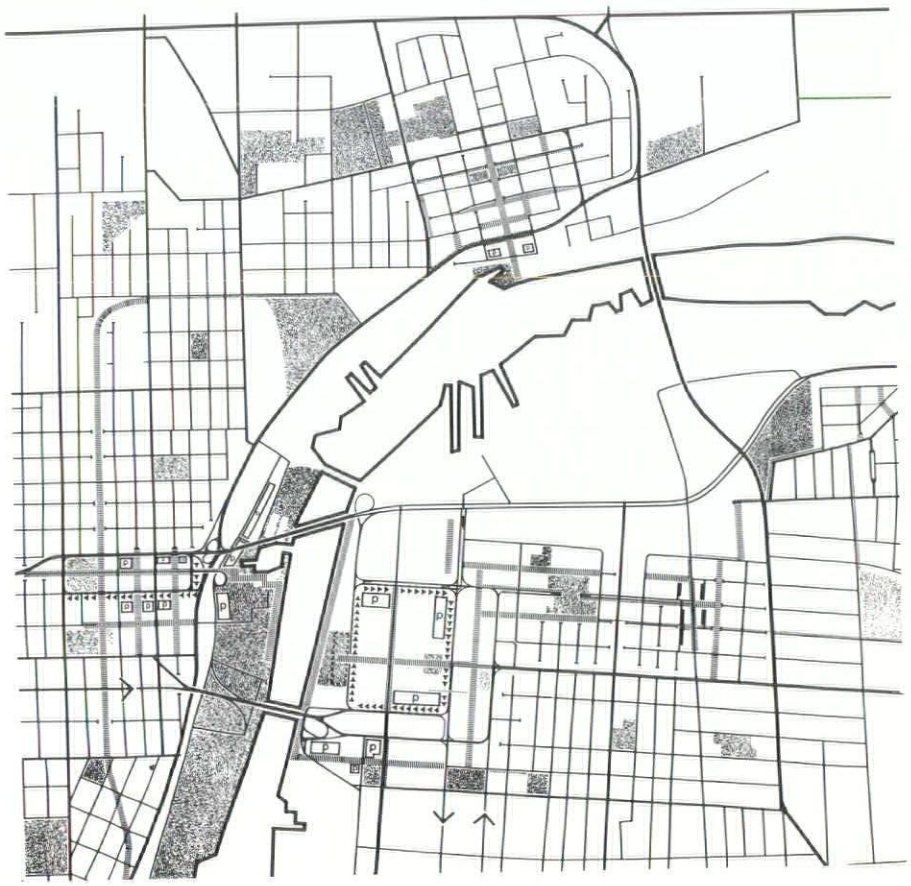
Before documenting area-wide circulation systems and generalized land use criteria, the study team focused its attention on district studies, or, in the language of the Study, "environmental sector" studies. The intent is to evaluate all physical development alternatives. So, seven areas throughout Bay City were selected for intensive design development. Two of these, the Midland Street area and the Central Business District, will be described in detail.

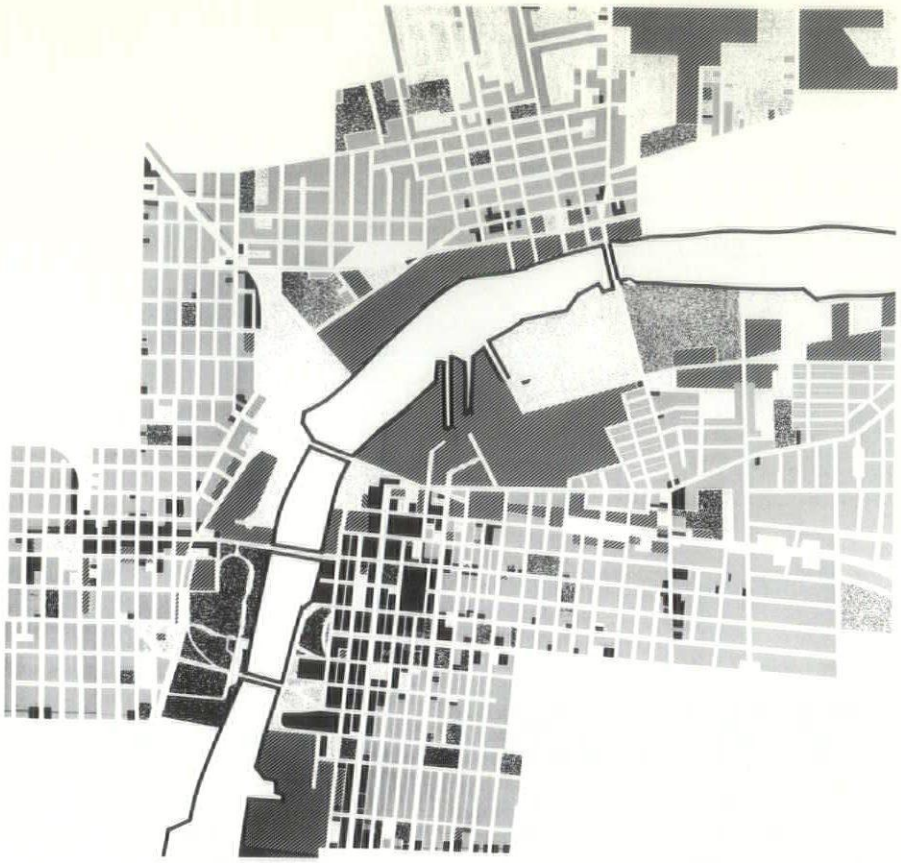
Existing Circulation

Bay City's existing circulation pattern is a two-way grid, interrupted and otherwise modified by the geophysical restraints of the Saginaw River. This pattern reflects the piecemeal growth of the six villages that consolidated to make up the city today. The principal deficiency of the system is the lack of a clear hierarchy of thorofares. Secondary arteries are often discontinuous. They are interrupted by too frequent access and penetrate rather than define neighborhoods. This results in a disorganized mix of conflicting traffic inputs.

Circulation Design

Circulation within the Riverfront North Study area is restructured to accommodate existing and anticipated major traffic generators. The form that evolves describes environmental sectors and circulation links, both vehicular and pedestrian. An important regional through-route, Business Route I-75, is treated as a peripheral artery to avoid congestion and conflict in the Central Business District. The major objective is to minimize conflict between pedestrian and vehicle such that both move efficiently and safely. A pattern emerges where pedestrian-oriented centers are developed as clusters, both visible and accessible from thorofares, yet not penetrated by them.



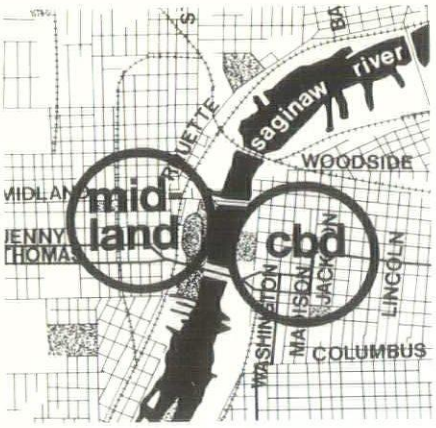


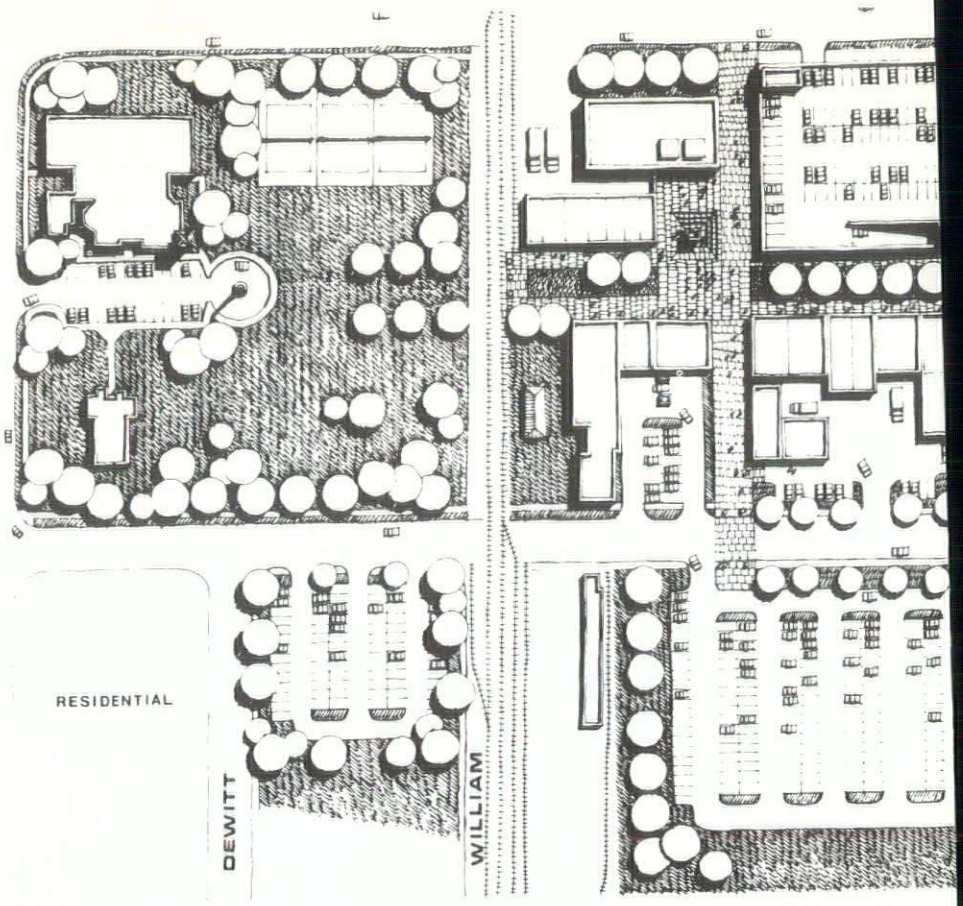
Existing Land Use

Bay City's existing land use pattern also reflects the city's evolution from a group of villages generated to support riverfront sawmills. Today's second and third generation re-use of riverfront industrial sites is poorly suited to the space and access needs of modern industry. This also introduces a filtering traffic flow through adjacent residential neighborhoods. Commercial areas of the city are generally overextended and merge with residential areas to form a vague transitional zone that includes incompatible uses and deteriorating structures.

Land Use Design

Land use as proposed in the Riverfront North Study is a consolidation of use sectors according to their dominant existing use and optimum projected use. The structural definition of these sectors resulted from circulation proposals mentioned earlier. The hierarchical nature of the new circulation proposals has resulted in structural definition and connection of land use sectors by the thorofares of the plan. Each use sector possesses defined edges and strengthened latent resources and can begin to realize its own identity. Each use sector is freed from the effect of extraneous traffic, yet shares an integrative open space system with adjacent sectors.





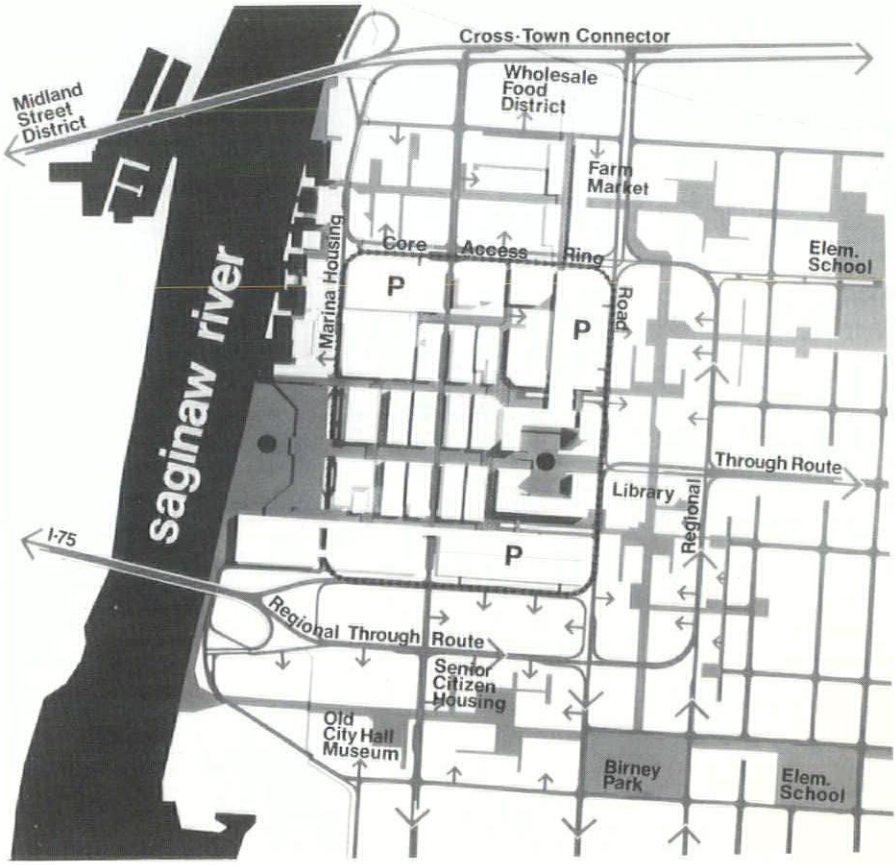
Central Business District

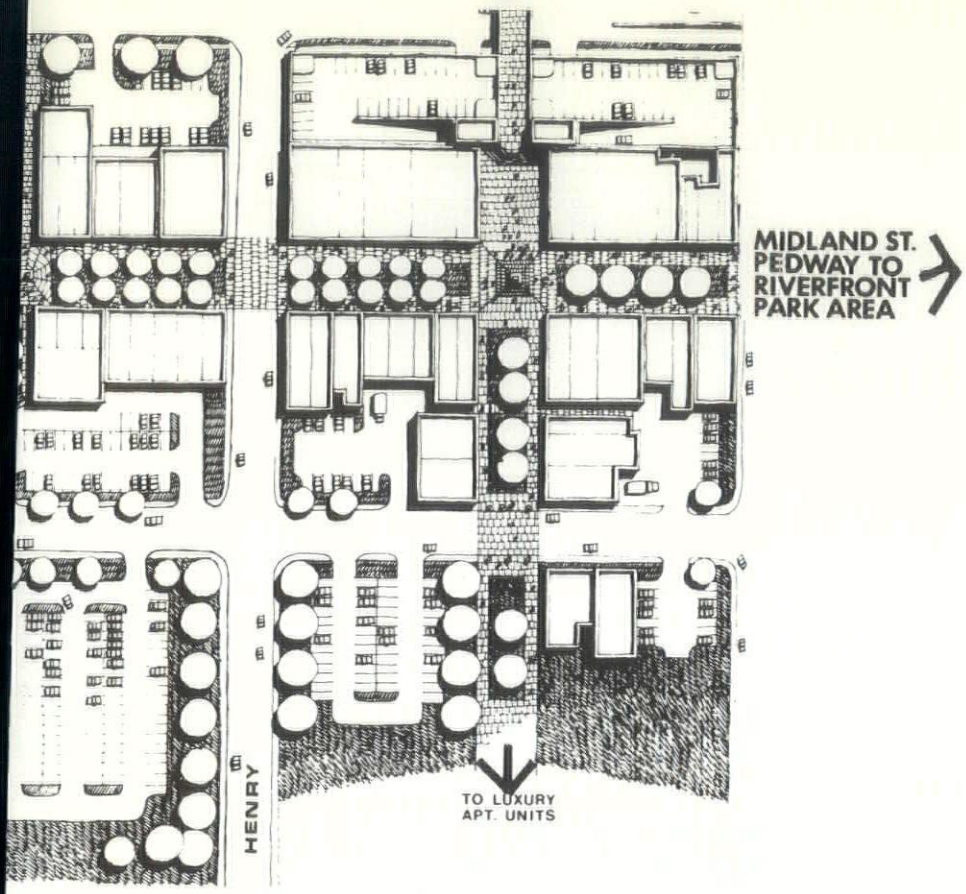
The Central Business District of Bay City is commercially healthy, yet physical deficiencies make it vulnerable to the decentralization process for both commercial and non-commercial uses.

The Riverfront North Study meets these problems head-on with a series of proposed design elements. Broad restructuring of the CBD circulation system will have the greatest impact. The core of the CBD is conceived as a place for pedestrian activity. For this reason, vehicular activity is confined to the periphery of the core-on a ring road.

The ring road serves to define the CBD core, evenly distributes traffic to specific core activities, and diverts extraneous traffic away from conflict with pedestrian zones. Parking structures along the ring road serve as terminal elements for vehicular circulation in the rest of the CBD.

The Design Study also proposes development of Battery Park as a government plaza, construction of a shopping arcade on Saginaw Street, and conversion of a portion of Center Street to use as a pedestrian mall.



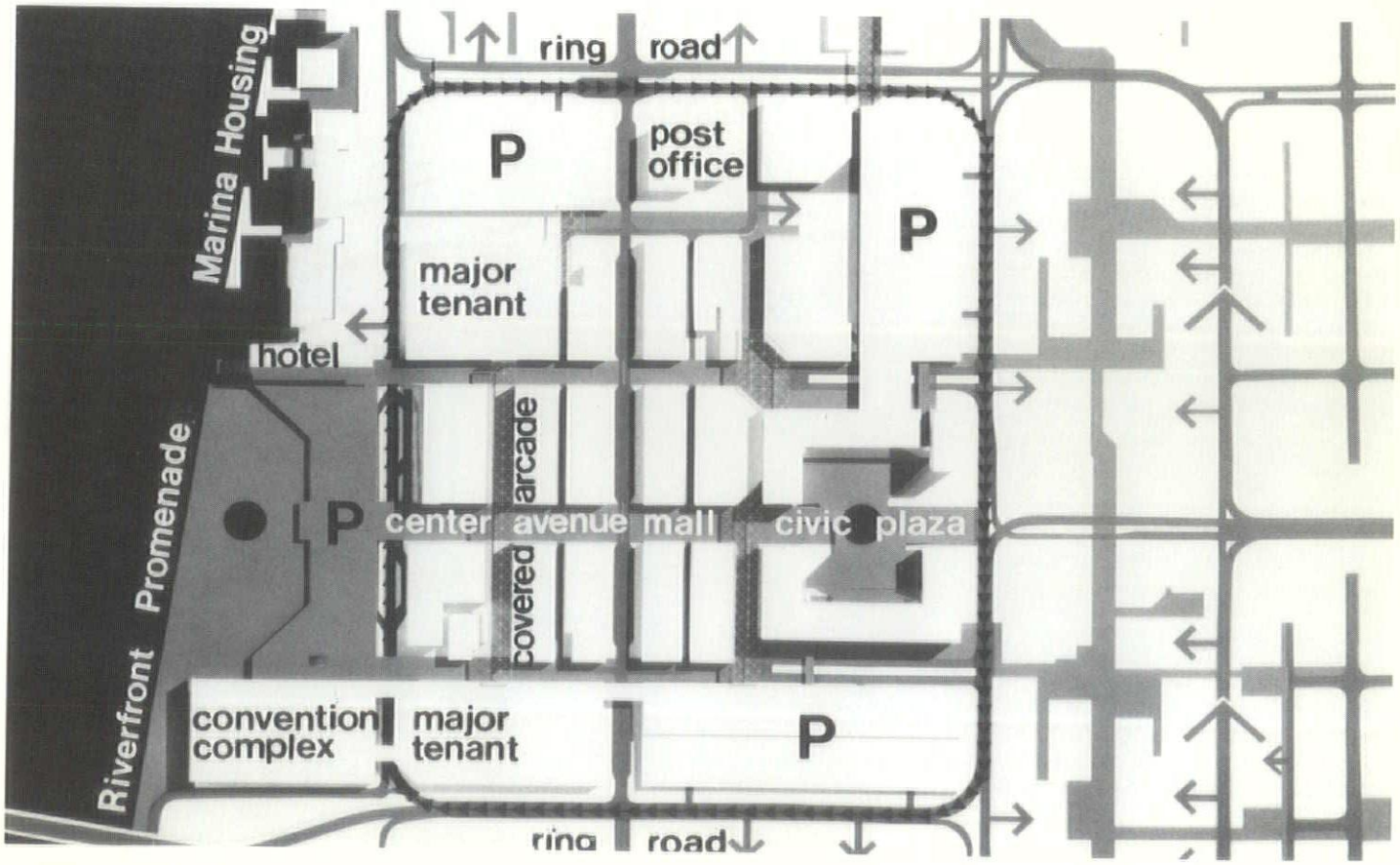


Midland Street Sector

Environmental Sector Study Areas
The Midland Street area is an existing neighborhood shopping district with a distinct turn-of-the-centruy image. As part of the Riverfront North Study, it is expected to take on local and regional importance with its relationship to a developing regional park along the Saginaw River. It is a viable district that is burdened with heavy through-traffic and insufficinet parking resources.

The proposed replacement of the Midland Street bridge over the river will allow the street to revert to local access and pedestrian use. Through-traffic will be rerouted along the north edge of the district, however, to maintain accessibility and high route visibility.

A pedestrian extension of Midland Street over a new north/south connector parallel to the river will help the district to relate to the developing regional park and marina complex.



Riverfront Open Space

In much the same way as Bay City looks back on the Saginaw River as its birthplace, the city must experience a rebirth of interest in the river as its most valuable resource. It is Bay City's major open space with great potential as a focal point for the Central Business District.

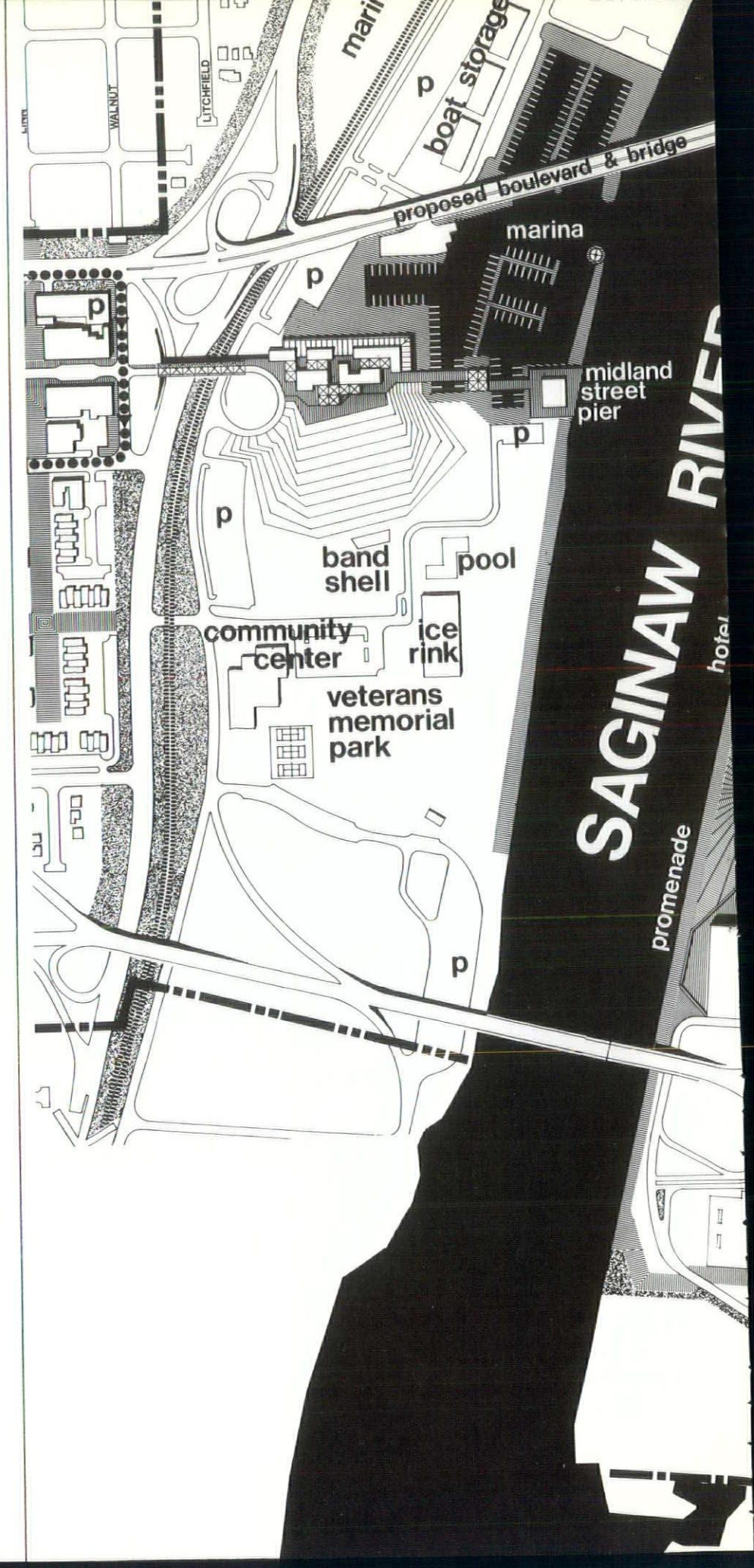
It is the intent of the plan that the banks of the Saginaw River be turned into pedestrian spaces wherever possible. Even small access points are conducive to watching river activity or taking a lunch break.

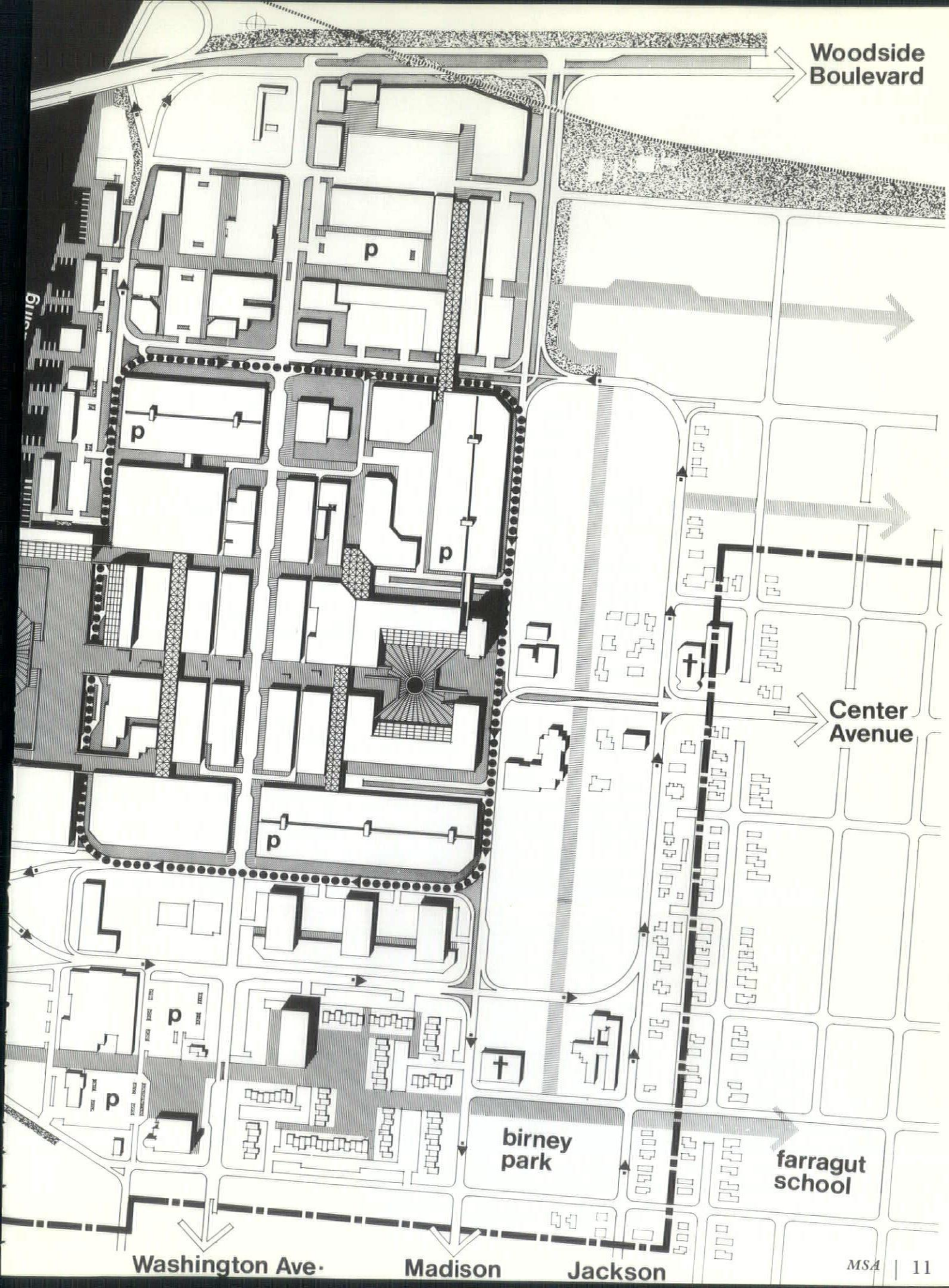
Veterans Memorial Park, if developed imaginatively, would allow a broadening of the commercial activities of the nearby Midland Street area to include specialty shops, restaurants and night-time entertainment. A bridge over Marquette Street and the marina would continue as an elevated dock-like promenade that would terminate in a dining pavilion at the river's edge.

Wenonah Park, in the heart of the CBD, adjacent to the ring road, and right on the bank of the river is the ideal setting for some of the cultural and public assembly facilities so wanting in Bay City. An exhibition hall, arena, auditorium and related shared facilities could occupy and integrated building complex with access to parking, the ring road and, consequently, the entire vehicular circulation system of the city.

Yet Wenonah Park is conceived as a place for people. Its broad riverfront promenade extends to a proposed marina apartment complex and beyond. It is one of a series of activity points along the continuous pedestrian network.

The two environmental sectors which have been described in detail here, the Midland Street area and the Central Business District, form the heart of Bay City. They are just two components of a city-wide integrative circulation network that ties the seven environmental sectors into a renewed consciousness of the river as the central focus of the city.




Woodside Boulevard
Center Avenue
birney park
farragut school
Washington Ave.
Madison
Jackson

Cont'd from page 3

created activity on the edge of an increasingly desolate sea.

Detroit has the potential and it could find the means. The crucial question is: Does it have the will to set about the stupendous job that needs to be done?

Relatives Wield Shovels

Relatives of three past deans of the University of Michigan College of Architecture and Design wield shovels at groundbreaking ceremonies for the College's new building on North Campus. From left: Mrs. Wells Bennett and Mrs. Philip N. Youtz, the wives of two late deans of the College, and Mrs. David Osler, daughter of the late Emil Lorch who was the College's first dean. Over 100 persons attended the ceremony on Novenber 1, 1972, at the building site opposite North Campus Commons. Also participating were Dean Reginald F. Malcolmson, U-M President Robben Fleming and other University Officials, along with state legislators and members of the architecture and contracting firms involved with the new facility. The $8.5 million building, designed by Swanson Associates, will be completed in about two years.

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